

A Clinical Overview of Mental Illness in Children

Questions Posed by the Commission

- **How is mental illness recognized in children?**
- **How is mental illness experienced across the developmental stages?**
- **How does mental illness in children differ from that in adults?**
- **How does a family recognize that a child is experiencing mental illness?**
- **What is the role of the family in recognizing and treating childhood mental illness?**
- **What treatment and support does the family need for the child to recover?**

An Alternate Schema

- **Context**
- **Etiology**
- **Presentation and Diagnosis**
- **Assessment**
- **Treatment**

Ross Andelman, M.D., Chief Psychiatrist, Children's Services, Contra Costa Mental Health
Little Hoover Commission, Public Hearing, October 26, 2000

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Etiology: Biology and the Environment

**The brain mediates experience of the world
AND
experience alters the developing brain.**

- **Genetics**
- **Intrauterine Environment**
 - **Maternal health and habits**
- **Early Childhood Health**
 - **Birth, Nutrition, Toxins, Disease**
- **Early Childhood Experience**
 - **Attachment & Stimulation vs. Neglect, Abuse, and Trauma**
 - **Safety, Dependability, & Affection vs. Danger, Chaos, & Rejection**

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The Context of Childhood Mental Illness

- **When: The Critical Role of Development**
 - **Cognitive Unfolding**
 - **Psycho-social Trials**
 - **Emergence of Morality**
- **Where: The World of the Child**
 - **At Home: the family environment**
 - **In School: the classroom, a community of peers and authority figures**
 - **Around Town: resources and temptations**
- **What: The Tasks and Roles of Childhood**
 - **Relating: loving and feeling loved**
 - **Playing & Learning: the jobs of childhood**
 - **Becoming: adulthood on the horizon**

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Presentation of Childhood Mental Illness The Experience of the Child and the Parent

SYMPTOMS

- **Mood Disturbance**
- **Fears and Worries**
- **Thought Disturbance**
- **Difficulty Concentrating**
- **Aggressive or Dangerous Behavior**
- **Compulsive Behavior**
- **Developmental Delay or Decline**

IMPAIRMENT

- **Disturbed Attachment**
- **Inability to Separate from Parent**
- **Communication Disturbance**
- **Impaired Peer Relationships**
- **Poor Academic Performance**
- **Risky or Antisocial behavior**
- **Alcohol or Drug Abuse**
- **Failure to Stay on Developmental Trajectory**

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Specific Diagnostic Categories in Childhood Mental Illness

- **Developmental Disorders and Mental Retardation**
- **Autism Spectrum Disorders**
- **Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder**
- **Other Disruptive Behavior Disorders**
- **Elimination Disorders**
- **Tic Disorders**
- **Mood Disorders**
 - **‘Unipolar’ Depression**
 - **Bipolar Disorder**
- **Anxiety Disorders**
 - **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**
 - **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**
- **Substance Use Disorders**
- **Psychotic Disorders**
- **Eating Disorders**
- **Learning and Communication Disorders**

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Assessment of Childhood Mental Illness

- **Multiple Informants Across All Relevant Life Contexts**
 - **Parents, Teachers, Other Clinicians, Other Caregivers & Family Members**
 - **The Child**
- **Inventory of Specific Symptoms, Impairment, Strengths**
 - **Do symptoms occur everywhere or only in one place (home vs. school)?**
 - **Are symptoms long-standing or new?**
 - **Are criteria met for a specific disorder?**
 - **Are there other specific disorders that should be ruled out?**
 - **How do symptoms impact on function?**
 - **Does the child and/or family have potentially therapeutic strengths?**
- **Assessment of the Child's Home, School, & Neighborhood Environment**
- **Assessment of Child's Past History: Medical, Social, Developmental**
- **Review of Family Mental Health and Medical History**

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Considerations in the Assessment of a Child's Quality of Life

- **Physical Health.**
 - **Fitness, Mobility, Physical symptoms, Pain.**
- **Emotional Well-being.**
 - **Mood, Anxiety, Self-Esteem, Sense of Self.**
- **Social Well-being.**
 - **Family Relationships, Peer Relationships, Relationships within the Broader Community.**
- **Role Functioning.**
 - **Daily Living & Family Activities, Academic Achievement, Recreation and Leisure.**
- **Adequacy of Environmental.**
 - **Home, School, Neighborhood, Community.**
 - **Social Support: Family, School, Community.**
 - **Additional Environmental Resources: Recreation, culture, nature.**

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Considerations in the Treatment of Mental Disorders

The Context of Treatment

- **Traditional Single Therapist**
- **Outpatient, Day Treatment, Residential & Hospital-based Treatment**
- **Wraparound, System of Care, and Case Management**

Psycho-social Treatments

- **Individual Psychotherapies**
 - **Supportive; Psycho-dynamic; Cognitive-Behavioral; Interpersonal; Narrative**
- **Family Therapies and Parent Training**
- **Group Therapies**

Psychotropic Medication

- **Psycho-stimulants**
- **Antidepressants**
- **Antipsychotics**
- **Anxiolytics and Others**
- **Herbs, Vitamins, Diets, and Alternative Remedies**